(b) if so, the details in this regard including the objectives India has to meet and the benefits it is likely to receive under the agreement;

(c) whether it is also a fact that obligations on the country outweigh the benefits likely to be received; and

(d) if so, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MURLI DEORA): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India and the Department of Energy, Government of United States of America entered into an Arrangement on 9th February, 2006 provides for exchange of information relating to the hydrocarbon sector. The objective of cooperation under this Arrangement is to establish a balanced exchange of information and statistical in the sector. Areas of cooperation include the following:—

(i) Exchange of annual hydrocarbon sector market statistics particularly production, imports, exports and stocks;

(ii) Exchange of data and information concerning fuel characterstics, refining capacity and reserves.

(iii) Exchange of information concerning statistical methods, analytics techniques and system documentation.

(c) and (d) No, Sir. The activities under this Arrangement are beneficial to both countries.

Problems faced by RRBs

†*277. SHRI MANGANI LAL MANDAL: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that despite reconstitution of all the Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) in the country, these banks are not only running under losses but have also failed to achieve their targets;

(b) whether it is also a fact that given the dominance of sponsoring banks, RRBs are facing difficulty in their independent development and working; and

(c) if so, the details thereof, State-wise and bank-wise?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) As a result of structural consolidation of Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) by amalgamation of RRBs sponsored by the same bank in a State, the number of RRBs have reduced from 196 to 92 as on date. The loss making RRBs have reduced from 22 at the closing of the year 2005-06 to 15 at the closing of the year 2006-07. Out of 15 loss making RRBs, seven RRBs have already booked current profit during the first half of the current year. Of the remaining eight RRBs, four are having losses of less than Rs 1 crore and are likely to post profit by the end of current financial year.

The targets for the RRBs are fixed by the sponsor bank on an annual basis in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Sponsor Bank and the RRB. The sponsor banks regularly hold meetings with Chairmen of RRBs to review the position and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi

take remedial action. The performance of RRBs has improved considerably as the percentage of their gross NPAs and Net NPAs has reduced from 8.53% and 4.84% respectively as on 31st March, 2005 to 6.49% and 3.44% respectively as on 31st March, 2007. The recovery percentage has improved from 77.67% in 2004-05 to79.80% in 2006-07. The Net Worth of RRBs as a whole has increased from Rs. 3,466.25 crore as on 31st March, 2005 to Rs. 4,545.86 crore as on 31st March, 2007.

(b) Sponsor banks have been given the responsibility for improving the performance of RRBs. As per the provisions of RRB Act, 1976, the sponsor bank depute Chairman and other senior personnel to RRBs for their effective functioning. The sponsor banks also provide legal, financial, technical and other expertise to RRBs. Boards of RRB are independent of sponsor bank and have been vested with powers to take decisions within the framework/ laid down policies of Government of India, Reserve Bank of India and NABARD. NABARD has reported that they have not come across any complaint from the RRBs about dominance of Sponsor Bank or any difficulty experienced by them either in the matter of independence or working of the Bank.

(c) Does not arise.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Memorial

*278. SHRI KANJIBHAI PATEL:
SHRI JAYANTILAL BAROT:

Will the Minister of CULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is considering to give corpus fund for development and maintenance of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Memorial at Karamsad;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF CULTURE (SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI): (a) to (c) The matter is under consideration.

Marine aquarium at Puri in Orissa

*279. MS. PRAMILA BOHIDAR:
SHRI B.J. PANDA:

Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether the State Government of Orissa proposes to set up a state-of-the-art marine aquarium at Puri to boost tourism in this region;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) what is the action plan of the Central Government to help the State to successfully execute this project?

THE MINISTER OF TOURISM (SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI): (a) to (c) The development and promotion of tourism is primarily undertaken by the State Governments/Union Territories themselves. However, the Ministry of Tourism provides Central Financial Assistance on the basis of project proposals received from the State Governments/Union Territories that